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Julie Sweet Unveils Digital Fluency Research on Wharton Business Radio

Radio Interview Transcript

Speakers: Group Chief Executive for North America, Julie Sweet and Wharton Business Radio hosts Nick Ashburn and Sheryl Kuhlman

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NICK ASHBURN: Welcome back. This is Dollars and Change on SiriusXM 111. I'm Nick Ashburn.

SHERRYL KUHLMAN: And I'm Sherryl Kuhlman co-hosting today.

NICK: She is Sherryl Kuhlman. She's my boss, everyone. And you are listening to Dollars and Change on Business Radio Powered by the Wharton School on SiriusXM 111. We will be talking to Julie Sweet, who is the Chief Executive Officer of North America for Accenture. And if you want to join the conversation, call us at 1-844-WHARTON, that's 1-844-942-7866 or you can shoot us an email, businessradio@siriusxm.com. We're also on the Twitter sphere @bizradio111 or @whartonsocial.

NICK: Well, welcome to the show, Julie.

JULIE SWEET: Great. Thanks a lot. Thanks for having me, Nick and Sherryl.

SHERRYL: We're glad to have you on.

NICK: We are glad to have you and just two days ago now was International Women's Day and we will be talking with you more about gender equality in the workplace. So why is this an issue for Accenture?

JULIE: Well, we have 370,000 people worldwide and what we bring to our clients is really our best people. So if you think about our size and what we do helping companies solve their hardest problems, talent is critical for us.

NICK: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

SHERRYL: Yes.

NICK: So I guess you just put out a report though on this issue. Walk us through I guess where – you know, why you were interested in looking at gender as an issue?

SHERRYL: And digital fluency specifically?

JULIE: Sure. So I think to give a little context, right, so at Accenture, we are very focused really what we do is help companies in the digital transformation, which you know, a lot of people talk about. And we are constantly talking to the C-Suite about the need for talent and how digital is really affecting all parts of the organization. So if you start from that context and you say, at Accenture our mission is to improve the way the world works and lives for our clients, our people and our communities. And in the context of International Women's Day, we said we have a very unique perspective in being able to look at digital and look at how it affects men and women and particularly how it might

be an opportunity for advancement from women. And so what we're trying to do is to take our expertise and because we believe as a people led organization, where talent is important to our clients, where we think gender equality is critical to what we're bringing to our clients in terms of diversity and then our responsibility in the community to make an impact, we said, let's look at digital and people. So that's – that's where we started. That's why we looked at it.

SHERRYL: And then – so when you're talking about digital, can you – it's – it's broad, so was there a specific area or what specifically was the focus there?

JULIE: Right, so what our focus was on, a lot of people talk about needing, you know, great high tech skills and that's very important and there's a lot of discussion, you have great organizations like girls who code talk about more women in computer science. We took a different look. We were looking at scale and we're saying if you take basic digital fluency, which we would define as the ability of people in their everyday and work life to do basic things, to use devices, to have technology, you know, be able to buy things, to be able to pay for things, to be able to at work be, you know, use a computer, be able to communicate with people over email.

SHERRYL: So this is basic stuff? I mean you're right, that's not writing the code, it's using the computer in ways that we do almost daily?

JULIE: Exactly. And that's what's exciting about the research. So what we said was let's first look at, and we looked at 31 countries, what's the level of basic digital fluency, right. And then we said and now how does that affect the advancement of men and women for education, participation in the workforce and leadership and what are the differences? And what we found is that, first of all, men in all countries that we looked at were ahead of women in terms of levels of digital fluency. But when they were – when they had the same levels of digital fluency, our research shows women use that digital fluency to accelerate, to go faster in terms of education and workforce participation. It's not yet a big effect on the advancement on the leadership piece. And so if you sort of say, now, this is the ability to upscale, because we're not talking about turning everyone into a computer scientist, but saying if we can lift the level of digital fluency, it helps men and women. And for women, it helps them get ahead faster and our research estimates that we could close the gender gap in developed countries in 25 years instead of 50.